

novel information to convey to the parapsychological community, but perhaps it will have much greater appeal to general readers.

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THE STRANGE CASE OF RUDI SCHNEIDER by Anita Gregory. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1985. Pp. xvii + 444. \$29.50, cloth.

The first thing to be said about this book is that, despite certain shortcomings, it is the most thorough and the most interesting historical study of a physical medium, perhaps of any sort of medium, so far published. I suspect, furthermore, that it is likely to occupy that position for the foreseeable future. The climate of modern parapsychology does not favor investigations of physical mediumship; physical mediums have become exceedingly rare; and those that one encounters—I speak from a fair amount of frustrating personal experience—are very often either manifestly fraudulent or else operate in an ambience of religious or pseudoscientific superstition that renders proper investigation almost impossible.

It was the great merit of Rudi Schneider (1908–1957) that, in addition to producing phenomena for which it is sometimes difficult to find a normal explanation, he was at all times courteous, cooperative, and willing to submit to whatever test conditions investigators wished to impose. Dr. Gregory documents in detail, and analyzes, the various stages of Rudi's career and the various investigations of which he was the subject. Her work is based on an extensive study both of the printed sources and of unpublished material from British and Continental archives.

In 1919, Rudi, the sixth surviving and youngest son of Catholic parents,<sup>1</sup> was living with his father and mother (his father was a compositor by trade, and Rudi became a motor mechanic) in Braunau am Inn, Upper Austria. Early that year, the family began in their apart-

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<sup>1</sup>So Dr. Gregory says, p. 4. But according to F. Kogelnik, who knew them well, the Schneiders "had nearly become atheists because they thought there was no proof at all for the narratives of the Bible in the view of modern natural science." See p. 166 of F. Kogelnik (1937), "Willy Schneider: The story of the early years of his mediumship," *Psychic Science*, vol. 16, pp. 164–182.

ment a "home circle" in which extraordinary physical phenomena soon developed. These included the telekinetic movement of small objects, the appearance of ectoplasmic clouds and masses, and ultimately the development of partial and full materializations. At first, the principal medium was Rudi's brother Willy (born 1903), but Rudi was soon drawn into the sittings as an auxiliary. Before long he inherited from Willy a trance control called "Olga," who claimed to have been the notorious Lola Montez. Olga generally insisted that those present keep up a constant flow of singing and chatter, a requirement that certain more academic sitters were later to find decidedly taxing.

It was probably during this period of joint mediumship that the Schneider phenomena were at their strongest and most dramatic; but only a few accounts have come down to us. A regular sitter, Kapitän F. Kogelnik, a retired naval officer living in Braunau, later published some recollections and notes,<sup>2</sup> from which it is apparent that, whether normal or paranormal, the effects produced (especially the materializations) were sometimes sufficiently peculiar. Kogelnik more than once detected Willy making highly suspicious use of pieces of light colored cloth,<sup>3</sup> but he remained firmly convinced that many of the phenomena were genuine, and he sent regular reports on them to Baron A. von Schrenck-Notzing of Munich, whose interest in such matters was widely known. Schrenck-Notzing had gained an early reputation as a hypnotherapist specializing in sexual problems and, following a wealthy marriage, had been able to indulge his interest in parapsychology to the extent of setting up his own laboratory. He was by no means universally liked or even credited by other parapsychologists—among English-speaking ones, he was nicknamed "Dr. Shrink-at-Nothing"—and Dr. Gregory tells us that "his somewhat overbearing manner" tended to estrange even potential sympathizers.

After a series of visits to Braunau, Schrenck-Notzing began to experiment with Willy, whom he brought to his laboratory in December 1921.<sup>4</sup> Rudi first came to the laboratory in June 1924, by which

<sup>2</sup>F. Kogelnik (1937), *ut supra*, and (1938), "Willy Schneider: The story of the early years of his mediumship," *Psychic Science*, vol. 16, pp. 197–214.

<sup>3</sup>Kogelnik (1937), p. 181; and cf. the letter and photograph sent by Kogelnik to Harry Price and published by the latter (pp. 162–163) and Plate XXII of H. Price (1933), "An account of some further experiments with Rudi Schneider," *Bulletin IV of the National Laboratory of Psychological Research*. The photographs of Willy's "teleplasms" published as Figures 240–244, Plate 150, of A. von Schrenck-Notzing (1923), *Materialisations-phaenomene*, Munich: E. Reinhardt, are, to put it mildly, far from reassuring.

<sup>4</sup>Gregory, p. 13. This is not strictly correct, since Willy paid what seems to have been his first visit to Schrenck-Notzing's laboratory on 14th December 1919. See p. 108 of A. von Schrenck-Notzing (1920), *Physikalische phaenomene des mediumismus*, Munich: E. Reinhardt.

time Willy's powers were in decline. With Rudi there occurred—in dim red light or in darkness, but with the medium ostensibly controlled by competent persons—frequent instances of apparent telekinesis and partial materialization, and occasional levitations of the medium's own body (which was rendered visible by luminous bands, pins, etc.). Other continental and some British and American investigators also had sittings, either at Braunau, or under Schrenck-Notzing's auspices, or independently.

Schrenck-Notzing's best known, and most interesting, innovation was his introduction from 1926 onwards of an electrical control system. The medium's hands and feet closed electrical circuits that caused lamps to stay alight. In the final version, metallic gloves were sewn onto the sleeves of Rudi's séance suit, and the manual controller's hands were also electrically controlled. Furthermore, a double floor was built into the cabinet, and a circuit so arranged that a red light would reveal the intrusion of any accomplice. The medium sat outside the cabinet (a curtained-off corner of the room). In front of the cabinet stood a table on which were placed small luminous target objects. This table was enclosed by a four-sided gauze screen. Over it hung a red light controlled by a rheostat.

Under these conditions, many of Rudi's staple phenomena still occurred, notably movements of small objects and partial materializations. Dr. Gregory has unearthed some little known, independent accounts of Schrenck-Notzing's last sittings with which to supplement the latter's protocols. These accounts are by Lt. E. von Paraquin, who was himself controlling the medium during the incident of January 17th, 1929, which he describes as follows:

Suddenly a light object pushed itself between the folds and approached slowly, and as it were hesitantly, the red bulb. It was a well developed hand, the fingers and thumb of which were clearly visible. Schrenck began to count aloud in order to ascertain how many seconds this excellently observable tentacle would remain visible. As I had made the resolution always to draw attention of the circle to the phenomena *during* the phenomena I lifted *both* hands of the medium (who was in deep trance), drew attention to two clearly visible stripes on Rudi's sleeves and the unaltered luminous indicator board of the electrical control apparatus. During the objective reflection delivered with complete calm and objectivity, the prehensile organ remained quietly in the luminous circle until Schrenck-Notzing had counted up to 25. (p. 53)

British parapsychologists tended to be skeptical concerning the electrical control, but Dr. Gregory is less so and observes (p. 52) that since, on the supposition of deliberate fraud, one would have to imag-

ine that the wiring systems were carefully rigged, Schrenck-Notzing would have had to be in on the fraud as well as his staff.

Following Schrenck-Notzing's unexpected death in February 1929, Rudi was quickly appropriated by one of the most controversial figures in British parapsychology, Harry Price, who had previously sat with him in Braunau. Price was a man of humble origins but immense drive who had, not to put too fine a point on it, married the money that enabled him to devote much of his time to psychical research. He found the Society for Psychical Research too staid and too stick-in-the-mud for his tastes, and also, no doubt, too little prone to recognize his own talents and preeminence. In 1925 he set up what was virtually a rival institution, the National Laboratory of Psychical Research.

Rudi gave five sittings at the National Laboratory in April 1929, and a further 21 between November 1929 and December 1930. He was controlled (as were the manual controller and the sitters) by means of a development of Schrenck-Notzing's electrical apparatus. Price's role was somewhere between that of scientist and impresario. The sitters whom he invited included psychical researchers, such as Lord Charles Hope and Dr. Eugène Osty, distinguished scientists, such as Lord Rayleigh and Professor A. F. C. Pollard, stage personalities, such as Stanley Holloway and Laurence Olivier, journalists, such as Hannen Swaffer, and a large number of miscellaneous persons whose reason for being there is far from clear. The resultant publicity was considerable, and highly satisfactory to Price, whose own report on the sittings was ready for publication by June 1930.<sup>5</sup>

The very first sitting set the tone for the remainder. "There were," says Dr. Gregory (p. 143), "[repeated] movements of the cabinet curtain and of a fan treated with luminous paint. A bell rang by itself, a celluloid trumpet was thrown off a table, a wastepaper basket rose in the air, raps were heard in response to a request for a specific number, and a table scraped across the floor. A materialized hand, or pseudopod, or 'white stump split into two or three sections' was seen manipulating a handkerchief by some sitters, including Mr. Price himself."

Dr. Gregory examines some contemporary criticisms of the electrical control and the proposal that the phenomena could have been produced by a conspiracy among certain of the sitters. Personally I find the counterarguments of Lord Charles Hope, a frequent sitter, almost decisive on both issues.<sup>6</sup> The suggestion of Mrs. Sidgwick,

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<sup>5</sup>H. Price (1930), *Rudi Schneider*, London: Methuen.

<sup>6</sup>Price (1930), pp. 193-205.

considered by Dr. Gregory on pages 162–166, that a confederate (of Rudi or of Price) might have crept into the cabinet during one of the frequent breaks in the proceedings seems to be ruled out by the fact that most sitters clearly preferred to remain in their seats during the breaks rather than bother to detach themselves from and then return to the electrical control.

One of Price's guests at the London sittings had been Dr. Eugène Osty, Director of the Institut Metapsychique International in Paris (which, incidentally, was funded by the state). Osty was a medical man, and, in collaboration with his son Marcel, an engineer, he now undertook in Paris an investigation of Rudi that began a new era in the instrumental recording of séance room phenomena.<sup>7</sup> The "target objects" for telekinetic movement were protected by infrared beams, the interruption of which automatically triggered flash photographs, or else a bell that would ring as long as the beams remained occluded to an extent greater than thirty percent, and could be used as the cue for a manually taken photograph. The objects were never disturbed; the beams were many times partially occluded; the photographs showed nothing, normal or paranormal, that could explain the occultations. Later on, the introduction of more sensitive instruments revealed a peculiar fact: the invisible substance that was interrupting the beams was vibrating at a rate corresponding to twice the rate of the medium's unnaturally rapid breathing.

Dr. Gregory makes (p. 176) the following strong claim concerning these experiments: "In the case of the Osty experiments I have no hesitation in saying that *if* the results claimed in Paris were obtained by normal means, then the Ostys, father and son, perpetrated an elaborate, expensive, and so far as one can see almost impossibly difficult and complex hoax. From the nature of the experiments Rudi could not have faked the results." I find it hard to disagree; though it is a pity that some young person of agility and ingenuity was not invited to attempt to duplicate the results by normal means.<sup>8</sup>

We now come to the most controversial episode in Rudi's career. In February 1932, Harry Price brought him to London for a further series of 27 séances. His powers were clearly waning, and during the

<sup>7</sup>E. and M. Osty (1932), *Les pouvoirs inconnus de l'esprit sur la matière*, Paris: Alcan; E. Osty (1933), *Supernormal aspects of energy and matter*, London: The Society for Psychical Research.

<sup>8</sup>Some brief, and not very convincing, proposals as to methods of fraud and possible natural explanations will be found on pp. 182n–183n of R. Amadou (1957), *Les grands médiums*, Paris: Éditions Denoël.

twenty-fifth séance, April 28, 1932, two cameras (one of them stereoscopic) caught Rudi apparently attempting a fraudulent maneuver with a freed arm. Rudi had been accused of fraud before, but none of the accusations, which Dr. Gregory analyzes in considerable detail,<sup>9</sup> were backed by any evidence worth the name. These photographs constitute the first, and only, bit of solid evidence against him, but they are difficult to assess. The flash apparatus, which had been triggered by the displacement of a handkerchief from a "counterpoise table," had malfunctioned, producing two flashes and a consequent "double exposure." Rudi's supporters were able to argue that the first flash caused him to jerk his arm free (the flashes always made him jerk convulsively), and the second caught him in this incriminating posture. Price, however, maintained that Rudi had freed a hand and displaced the handkerchief, being caught by the first flash before he could return his hand to control.

Dr. Gregory has yet another interpretation. We know that the photographs were taken shortly after Price had had a furious row with certain members of the Council of the National Laboratory. The cause of this row was the desire of some of them (especially Lord Charles Hope) to hold a series of sittings with Rudi independently of Price. The infuriated Price (a skilled photographer) thereupon faked the incriminating photographs (Dr. Gregory argues in detail that the photographs bear signs of this) but kept them to himself. Later, when Lord Charles's favorable report on Rudi was about to come out, Price vindictively published them with maximum press coverage.<sup>10</sup> I have criticized Dr. Gregory's arguments at some length elsewhere,<sup>11</sup> and it would not be appropriate to reopen the matter here. Her suspicions of Price generalize beyond the immediate issue of the photographs, and she is, I fear, sometimes prone to let these suspicions warp her judgment. To take just one example: she says on page 259 that C. C. L. Gregory (a sitter at Price's 1932 series) told her that he had reason to believe that Price altered one of the séance temperature charts, and adds that unfortunately she cannot remember details. This is at best a distant memory of someone else's distant memory; and in

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<sup>9</sup>She omits one or two; for instance, the claim, published by Rosenbusch, that when a target object was left covered in wet paint during a séance, it was moved, and paint was found on Rudi's hands afterwards. See H. Rosenbusch (1928), "Protokoll einer Entlarvung Rudi Schneiders," *Zeitschrift für kritischen Okkultismus*, vol. 3, pp. 516–519. But the provenance of this accusation is unclear.

<sup>10</sup>Price (1933), *op. cit.*

<sup>11</sup>*Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 1978, vol. 49, pp. 828–835, and 1979, vol. 50, pp. 46–47.

any case Price states categorically that temperature records were not kept.<sup>12</sup> It is only fair to add that Dr. Gregory gives on pages 139–140 a very just summary of Price's character and motives.

Lord Charles Hope was successful in securing Rudi's services for a series of sittings in London. The report on them<sup>13</sup> is really a series of loosely connected, individual reports, and Dr. Gregory, through following it perhaps a little too closely, gives an account that is not easy to assimilate. The principal aim of the experimenters was to replicate Osty's findings with his infrared apparatus. It was apparent, however, that Rudi's powers were failing. There were 84 ostensibly paranormal movements of small objects, and over 275 partial occultations of the infrared beam. Attempts to photograph the occulting substance revealed nothing. Rudi was controlled manually; but at times he and the chief controller were enclosed in a muslin cage, while the infrared apparatus was separated from the medium and sitters by a muslin screen. Dr. Gregory states (p. 335) that Osty's observation that the occulting something oscillated at twice the rate of the medium's breathing was confirmed at these sittings. However, I can find no clear statement in the original report that this was so, and Rudi's breathing was not in fact instrumentally recorded.

Two further series of sittings, by Osty and Besterman and by Besterman and Gatty, failed to obtain interruptions of an infrared beam, or any other phenomena worthy of note, and Rudi thereafter more or less disappeared from the international parapsychological scene.

There is much more in this absorbing book than I have been able to indicate here. From Dr. Gregory's final assessment of Rudi's mediumship, I find it impossible to dissent:

If one wishes to dismiss all of Rudi's phenomena, one has to posit that the penniless Austrian garage mechanic, who was in the hands of sophisticated, skeptical, often hostile investigators from the age of eleven, was one of the most accomplished swindlers the world has ever known. He must have been capable of enrolling accomplices under the most fantastically unlikely conditions, in countries the languages of which he did not speak. He must have hoodwinked hundreds of people, among them scores of learned and scientific observers, assembled for the very purpose of catching him out.

His séances were monotonous in the extreme, and not in any way comparable to conjuring performances: conjurors will vary their reper-

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<sup>12</sup>Price (1933), *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>13</sup>C. Hope et al. (1933), "Report of a Series of Sittings with Rudi Schneider," *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, vol. 41, pp. 255–330.

toire, refusing to repeat tricks; conjurors will dictate conditions; Rudi's séances were repetitive, and he submitted to all conditions ever suggested to him.

The very poverty of the quality of the "exposures" of Rudi bears testimony either to his fantastic prowess as a trickster or to his genuineness. (pp. 408-409)

I could wish, however, that the overall balance of this study had been a little different. At 121 pages, the rather unsatisfactory chapter on Price and the "double exposure" occupies more than a quarter of the book. At least some of this space might have been better devoted to a longer account of Schrenck-Notzing's work with Rudi. Schrenck-Notzing had altogether 88 sittings, 35 more than did Price.<sup>14</sup> Also, Dr. Gregory presents Rudi almost as a one-off case. Even the phenomena produced by his brother Willy receive scant mention. Yet surely a comparison of Rudi's phenomena with those of Willy, Eusapia Palladino, Home, and others would have been appropriate and probably revealing.<sup>15</sup> More generally, Dr. Gregory fails to locate the case of Rudi Schneider in its proper context as part of the ongoing *Kampf um die Materialisations-Phänomene* which divided Continental parapsychologists in the first few decades of the present century.<sup>16</sup> And it is to be regretted that she does not use her account of Rudi as the basis for a discussion of how modern science and technology might be deployed in the investigation of any future case of the like kind.

I noticed a number of small oversights that could perhaps be corrected on a second printing. On pages 5 et seq., "J. Kogelnik" should be "F. Kogelnik"; on pages 15, 18, 126, and 128 "John Cohen" should be "David Cohen"; on pages 22 and 27 "1932" should presumably be "1923"; on page 36 "musical box" (*Spieldose*) should be inserted after, or instead of, "clockwork"; on page 50 Dr. Gregory says she has added a dotted line to the diagram on page 51, which in fact she has not done (it is identical with Schrenck-Notzing's original); on page 123 Dr. Gregory disguises the name of Oscar Schlag under the initials "S. O.," which may lead to his being

<sup>14</sup>A. von Schrenck-Notzing (1933), *Die phänomene des mediums Rudi Schneider*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

<sup>15</sup>For a comparison of Willy Schneider's phenomena with those of Eusapia Palladino, see A. von Schrenck-Notzing (1923), *op. cit.*, pp. 597-601.

<sup>16</sup>Among the central documents of this war are the highly critical work by W. von Gulat-Wellenburg, C. Von Klinikowstroem, and H. Rosenbusch (1925), *Der physikalische Mediumismus*, Berlin & Ullstein (known as the *Dreimännerbuch*), and the reply edited by A. von Schrenck-Notzing (1926), *Die physikalischen Phänomene der grossen Medien*, Stuttgart: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft (known as the *Siebenmännerbuch*).



confused with Stefan Ossowiecki; on page 128, reference 44, the year 1961 must be wrong; on page 129 "six séances" should be "five séances"; on page 151 "Zanzig" should be "Zancig"; on page 202 "Gusik" should be "Guzik"; on pages 252 and 296 "MacDougall" should be "McDougall"; and on page 341 "tinsley" should be "Tinsley."

Dr. Gregory did not live to see this book in print. But if it serves, as it certainly should, to reawaken interest in some very puzzling matters, it will have made a valuable, and I think a needed, contribution to parapsychology.

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